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A Daniloff sellout?

President Reagan still has done nothing to free Nicholas Daniloff, the *U.S. News & World Report* correspondent imprisoned in Moscow's Lefortovo prison on "suspicion" of espionage. Accounts vary, but it appears that Mr. Reagan is pondering a trade — Mr. Daniloff for Gennadi Zakharov, the Soviet U.N. employee accused of spying in New York.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes says that Mr. Reagan is "angry" about the jailing of Mr. Daniloff and that "incidents like this... cannot help U.S.-Soviet relations." But he quickly adds that the planned summit meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev remains "potentially important," and Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze are to meet in Washington later this month to iron out the details.

Mr. Reagan evidently forgets that a previous agreement, the Helsinki Accords signed in 1975 by Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, prohibit the harassment of foreign journalists. The Soviets have not disdained to expel an occasional Western journalist since,

but this is the first time since Stalin that they have jailed one — another example of Mr. Gorbachev's neo-Stalinist mentality.

It's easy to see why the Soviets singled out Mr. Daniloff. As Andrew Nagorski recounted in his book *Reluctant Farewell*, most American correspondents in Moscow are content to hang their stories on Tass press releases or translations from *Pravda*, and many of them speak little or no Russian. Mr. Daniloff, in contrast, besides being fluent in Russian, is an enterprising reporter who, among other coups, discovered the mass grave for the victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Better relations with Moscow depend not on chitchats between Messrs. Reagan and Gorbachev, but on lifting the Iron Curtain, allowing the American people to peek inside that closed society. For this reason alone Mr. Reagan should force the Soviets to release Mr. Daniloff — and not as part of any "trade," but unconditionally. Rather than offering to trade Mr. Daniloff, as if the accusations against him were not trumped up, Mr. Reagan might send a simple, four-word message to the Kremlin — "No Daniloff, no summit" — and let the chips fall.